

Asian Resource Center
Asian Federation on Intellectual Disabilities

Star Raft Award 2013

星槎賞

The winner

OUTSTANDING ACTIVITIES PROVIDED BY VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

ASTHA in Hazaribagh, INDIA

8th, Oct, 2013



What does "Seisa/ Star Raft"?

There is an old Chinese story. A young man in a period under strict national isolation dared to go out and see the world. When he returned he saved his country with the knowledge and experience he gained abroad. It is said that his raft arose from the sea and traveled across the sky. A raft of logs of different lengths tied together with a strong rope. The word "Seisa" is composed of two Chinese characters, "Sei" is the "Star" character. "Sa" is the "raft" character.

It is hope of Seisa Group to be your Raft with the spirit of "Living Together".

Malnutrition- A vicious cycle in which a child actually gets trapped inside his mother's womb itself even before he has taken birth. His life succumbs to fatality in the pre arrival of his in the world. First, the improper nutrition to the mother and then to the child both add up to ultimately block the fruitful growth of the child to which he has every right to entitlement. In the absence of a balanced nutrition, evil effects of malnutrition starts figuring in and the immunity of children against deadly diseases starts diminishing -this finally results in pre mature deaths of them.

The issue of tackling Malnutrition has repeatedly troubled the policy makers especially in South Asian countries like India. Due to a huge population and a larger percentage of them being mired with poverty, it often becomes difficult for the government to directly provide relief to them given the poor infrastructure and lack of resource, funds etc.

In this respect the initiative of District Administration of Hazaribagh, a small district in the tribal dominated state of Jharkhand, is really a commendable one. Known by various names like "Kuposhan ke khilaf Jung me, Hum Sab Sang me" (In the fight against Malnutrition, All of us are together), "Bachpan Bachao" (Save Childhood), "Jeevan Asha" (Hope for life), this initiative has been an excellent example in terms of decentralized policy formulation & implementation.

The story of this initiative started about ten months ago when reports regarding wide infant deaths started pouring in throughout the district. This was slightly ridiculous because in every district there exist MTC (Malnutrition Treatment Centre) which has been designed to take care for such cases. When this matter was further investigated it was found that the capacity of regular treatment is by far restricted vis-it-vis the number of cases arrived. It was then concluded that the resources of the state is grossly limited to cater to such a situation and something out of way must be planned immediately to counter the issue.

A drive across the district was carried out to locate the exact number of such malnourished children by deploying more than 900 teams who were supposed to visit every health center in the nook and corner of the district, measure the vital statistics like weight, height, muscles, edema etc and identify the children suffering with SAM (Severe Acute Malnutrition). This strategy was devolved by way of a "Jan Samvad" a kind of "Public Dialogue" which was conducted prior to this survey with the participation of all the possible stakeholders to this initiative. In this survey it was observed that the state of health of a number of children in the district was pitiable. Most of them showed a complete lack of growth, skin devoid of any muscles, bones easily prone to fracture, swollen stomachs, protruding eyes etc. In fact these were signs of deficiency diseases like Kwashiorkar, Marasmus, Pellagra, Rickets, Night Blindness etc. the horribleness of which were unknown to the poor people.

Knowing the fact that the direct interference of the government is difficult, the District Administration under the

able leadership of Dr. Manish Ranjan, Collector cum District Magistrate decided to rope in the local people to eradicate this problem. The poor state of children health and abject poverty level of their parents were widely publicized in the media and discussed through meetings, seminars and conferences in various forums. The effect of such advertisements had a cumulative effect on the civil society as a number of local intelligentsia, affluent class, government servants, NGO etc came forward voluntarily to extend all kinds of supports. The District Administration extended warm appreciation to everyone for such a nice gratitude of theirs towards the society and made a small request to adopt as many of those children as possible thereby bringing them out from the evil clutches of Malnutrition. The adoption was not like the true adoption but in the form of monetary help of a mere Rs. 150/- per month to the parents of the affected child. In this way the child was to remain with his parents only with the funding coming to him in the form of donation by his adopting parents.

An important aspect of this initiative was the development of a balanced nutritious food material made out of cheap ingredients like wheat, oat, barley etc which was cheap and easily digestible by the child. It was actually the conventional wisdom of the elders in the villages which was behind the development of this food. Availability of this food at all the health centers was ensured.

Such was the popularity of this initiative that nearly all the 2000 odd SAM children who were identified were successfully adopted by one or the other parents.

It is quite understandable that not only poverty but ignorance and illiteracy have also played a vital role in spread of malnutrition. The practice of marrying girls during their teenage, conceiving before the appropriate age, lack of nutritious food during pregnancy, lack of colostrum feeding to the child, lack of substantial diet six months after birth, superstitions etc are some of the major reasons behind the ill health of children. The District administration tried to hit this aspect often exceptionally through its public awareness programmes where experts from hospitals, institutions, universities and international organizations used to lighten the minds of everyone.

Summing up, it was indeed a unique and highly appreciable initiative since six months after its inception there was evident examples of improvement in health among children earlier suffering from deficiency diseases. This practice of mobilizing community itself and using local resources without roping in government resources was an unconventional approach which was well undertaken by the administration. The method by which general public was sensitized who finally realized that there are some of the responsibilities which everyone must take care as a human for the mankind as a whole was a good breakthrough. In all respect, this initiative deserve all applauds and replication across the globe.